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Press release
Monday 16th January 2017

Day 72: Photo-finish predicted in Vendée Globe thriller

The Vendée Globe is going down to the wire with the leading pair of Armel Le Cléac'h and Alex Thomson split by just 78 miles as they enter the final 1,000 miles to the finish.



Sailing aerial images of the IMOCA boat Hugo Boss, skipper Alex Thomson (GBR), during training solo for the Vendée Globe 2016, off England, on September 16, 2016 - Photo Cleo Barnham / Hugo Boss / Vendée Globe

Thomson has been playing catch-up since Le Cléac'h took the lead on December 2 but as the race enters its final few days he has transformed from the chaser into the hunter, ruthlessly stalking his French rival in the hope of being able to deliver the killer blow before the race is up. The British skipper delivered a timely warning to French skipper Le Cléac'h today when he smashed the world record for the greatest distance sailed solo in 24 hours. Hugo Boss skipper Thomson maintained a staggering average speed of 22.4 knots in the 24 hours leading up to the 0800 UTC position update to notch up 536.8nm. The distance breaks the 534.48nm record set by François Gabart in the 2012-13 Vendée Globe that he went on to win, beating Le Cléac'h by just three hours. In that respect the new record could be considered a good omen by Thomson, who is aiming to become the first Brit in the race's 27-year history to win it. He actually beat Gabart's record two weeks into the race, sailing 535.34nm in 24 hours, but the rules of the record state it must be superseded by one whole mile. Thomson previously held the record between 2003 and 2012 with a distance of 468.72nm. The new record will now be ratified by the World Sailing Speed Record Council.

Banque Populaire skipper and pre-race favourite Le Cléac'h has hardly been easing off on his run into the finish. Over the same 24-hour period he covered 515 miles at an average of 21.5 knots. By the 1400 UTC report Le Cléac'h was matching Thomson's 21 knots of boat speed with a slim buffer of 78 miles at the latitude of Cape Finisterre on the north-west point of Spain. Rather than head for the finish line in the Vendée port of Les Sables d'Olonne the duo must continue north east to avoid the centre of an anticyclone currently blocking their path east. By tomorrow the winds and therefore boat speeds will have dropped, and several days of light-wind sailing lie ahead. Both skippers are expected to finish on Thursday January 19, potentially just a few hours apart.

Throughout the fleet, today split by 9,000nm from head to tail, there has been

admiration for Thomson's new record. "Alex's record is seriously impressive," said New Zealander Conrad Colman, some 6,000nm behind the leaders. "I've been watching his average boat speed closely, and the idea of staying at 23 knots for 24 hours is absurd. I think the new generation of IMOCA are incredible and as soon as I put my feet back on the ground I'll be looking to cement a new project for myself and join the club 'flying'." Yann Eliès, skipper of fifth-placed Queguiner-Leucémie Espoir, added: "It's a great performance. Alex seems to be able to keep up average speeds a little above those of Armel, so we'll be watching the final four days closely."

Thomson was not the only skipper with cause for celebration today. Fabrice Amedeo in 11th and Arnaud Boissières in 12th both rounded Cape Horn, the southern tip of South America, to begin their ascent through the Atlantic to the finish line. Amedeo rounded at 0140 UTC with Boissières following suit just over four hours later. Thirteenth-placed Swiss sailor Alan Roura will be next round Cape Horn, adrift by just 30 miles at 1400 UTC. Rich Wilson in fourteenth still has 150nm to go. Meanwhile 65-year-old Dutch sailor Pieter Heerema passed Point Nemo, the most remote place on the planet more than 1,700 miles from inhabited land. "Now I want to get around Cape Horn as quickly as possible," he said. "It's a really key landmark. We're now 70 days into this race and there's still a long way to go. I'm enjoying it but I've also more or less had enough."

THE 1400 UTC RANKINGS

AT 15H00	SKIPPER/BOAT	PROGRESS	DISTANCE TO LEADER	DISTANCE TO FINISH
1	 Armel LE CLÉAC'H BANQUE POPULAIRE VII	→	0 nm	812 nm
2	 Alex THOMSON HUGO BOSS	→	78.07 nm	890 nm
3	 Jérémie BEYOU MAITRE COQ	→	830.46 nm	1642 nm
4	 Jean-Pierre DICK StMICHEL-VIRBAC	→	1510.61 nm	2323 nm
5	 Yann ELIES QUÉGUINER - LEUCÉMI...	→	1733.11 nm	2545 nm

[The mapping](#)

Tracker and daily rankings (6 times a day)
0400 / 0800 / 1100 / 1400 / 1700 / 2100 hrs UTC
> [View the complete rankings here](#)

EXTRACTS FROM TODAY'S RADIO SESSIONS

Jérémie Beyou (Maître CoQ): "I'm within ten days of the finish, which psychologically is important, because I have had the impression that the day is never going to end for a while now. The days when you don't clock up many miles aren't much fun. Over the past couple of days I have seen the two frontrunners accelerate, so it will be my turn soon to change gear. I should be around 7 days from the finish, but I'm going faster than my routing showed. The autopilot is working well with my third and final wind gauge fitted out on the deck. I can even go and grab some sleep. All I want now is for the weather to become clearer ahead."

Pieter Heerema (No Way Back): "I'm at Point Nemo, as far as you can be from any land. I'm pushing very hard but within limits of safety because I need to keep the boat in one piece. It's foggy and I can't see more than 150 metres anyway, so a ship could pass and I wouldn't even notice it. It's a bit of a weird feeling that on the AIS I haven't seen more than three vessels in four or five weeks. I've seen nothing on AIS in the whole Pacific and I have a range of 50 miles. It's really empty. Since I put my issues aside and started doing what I can with what I have it has been good. I spend all my time sailing the boat now and I'm twice as fast as I have been. We're making a nice crossing of the Pacific and I think we're going to make a very good time across it."

Jean Le Cam, Finistère Mer Vent: "It's been months since we have been able to rest like this. Consequently when we wake up everything feels stiff. It's as if your body is going through a complete change. We don't have any sail changes to do for the moment, so we are getting some rest. We have been alongside Yann since Tasmania. Sometimes it's him who is lifted and sometimes me. We have to cross a

ridge of high pressure and then get to the south of a low. According to the latest routing, I have 9 days and 17 hours left, so we should arrive on 25th or 26th. The next generation of boats will be designed for foils and will achieve average speeds in excess of 22 knots, so they'll be close to the speeds of the lows in the Southern Ocean. I'm getting fed up with all the weed. It gets around the rudders. It's funny as it was the same four years ago and two years ago in the Barcelona World Race, we got the weed on the way up after not having any problems on the way down. Just now a wave broke over the deck and we had weed everywhere."

Conrad Colman (Foresight Natural Energy): "Things are great - well, as great as they can be for someone with 1,000 miles of upwind sailing ahead of them. I've got a cloudless blue sky and relatively flat seas, and quite frankly it's really nice to be here after the Southern Ocean where everything was grey and trying to kill me. It's tricky for me though - Nandor is 800 miles ahead and in completely different wind so there's no chance of catching him. My sail wardrobe is very limited now - I have three sails that are no longer usable, and it's a huge limiter on my performance. Whereas Eric (Bellion) can sail upwind or reach with Solent and one reef, I need to work hard to change my sails all the time. I have one sail bigger than is ideal and one smaller. I need to constantly change them to keep the boat going. In a straight drag race I'm not going to catch them so I have to look at interesting ways to get through the weather that will play to my strengths."

Yann Eliès, Queguiner-Leucémie Espoir : "The average cruising sailor wouldn't pay attention to all the weed, but we are Figaro racers and that annoys us, because it gets everywhere around the rudders and daggerboard. The shape of the rudder changes and that creates a cavitation effect, so the boat is not so easy to steer. Occasionally we have to stop, lift up the rudder and get rid of all the weed. The area affected by weed appears to have grown. I understand that as a Breton, who has seen the proliferation of weed. I hope we find a solution so that the weed does not spread throughout the paradise waters of the Caribbean."

RADIO SESSIONS

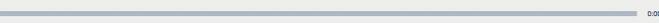


48 min ago

Vacation at 1 pm with Conrad Colman



0:00



0:00

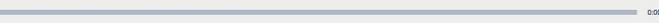


5 h ago

Vacation at 10 am with Pieter Heerema



0:00



0:00

> Listen to all of the radio sessions here

PHOTOS



> Download the photos in HD format directly from the photo server (access via the press section) here

VIDEOS



Onboard :
Alex Thomson - Hugo Boss



Onboard :
Conrad Colman - Foresight Natural Energy

> Download the videos in HD format directly from the video server (access via the press section) [here](#)

RADIO SESSION - 17TH JANUARY

RADIO SESSION OF 09h00 UTC
- NANDOR FA (EN)

VENDÉE LIVE (EN) FROM 12H00 TO 12H15 UTC
- RICH WILSON (EN) = VISIO (12H05 UTC)

PRESS ACCREDITATION

If you wish to attend the finish, please click on the following link and fill out this form.

[ARRIVALS ACCREDITATION](#)

HOW TO FOLLOW THE RACE

RADIO SESSIONS

1 - Recorded radio sessions: 3 times a day (0330, 0900, 1400hrs UTC)
The radio sessions at 0900 and 1400hrs UTC will be open to the press on request. Please apply to the press service.
Once recorded, these radio sessions will be made available to audiovisual media. These recordings are free of rights.

DAILY LIVE SHOWS

- Live programmes (VENDÉE LIVE): 3 programmes a day (LIVE from 1100hrs - 1130hrs UTC) in French and at 1200hrs UTC for the international skippers in English.
- The live shows and radio sessions will be held in the TV studio - Vendée Globe Race HQ, quai Branly (Paris).
- The VENDÉE LIVE programme will be shown on the official website, web TV, Facebook LIVE, Dailymotion
These live shows will be available for replay on Dailymotion and on the Vendée Globe Facebook page

TV ARRANGEMENTS

- Daily VNR (source: Inmarsat, video conference, 3D images, B. Images): available everyday in English and French from 1700hrs UTC
- Footage from the boats (taken by the skippers): Footage received every day
- Weekly VNR programme en French and English on Fridays from 1500hrs UTC

All of the pictures and programmes will also be available on the video server www.vendeeglobe.tv

CONTACTS

Press service :

Director : Fabrice Thomazeau
+ 33 (0)6 86 00 06 73 - fabrice.thomazeau@mer-media.com

Press Coordination : Bénédicte Etienne :
+ 33 (0)6 87 30 12 83 - benedicte.etienne@mer-media.com

Press - radios / French print media : Alexandra Quelven
+ 33 (0)6 58 85 20 70 -
alexandra.mer.media@gmail.com

Press - French TV / Web : Eléonore Villers
+ 33 (0)6 68 48 53 49 -
eleonore.mer.media@gmail.com

Logistics / Accreditation / Boat trips : Emilie Llorens
+ 33 (0)6 31 30 95 55 - emilie.mer.media@gmail.com

International press : Helena PAZ
+34 659 293 291 -
international.mer.media@gmail.com

TV production :

Production contact : Hervé Borde -
+33 6 09 67 85 52 - hborde@nefertiti-prod.com
Distribution contact : Cédric Rampelberg -
+33 7 87 82 24 93 - crampelberg@aso.fr

Radio production :

Studio contact :
+33(0)1 57 40 53 11 - vacation@6eme-sens.tv

Photo production :

Arnaud Letrésor - +33 6 31 58 69 03 -
aletresor@dppi.net





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